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November 14, 2013

White Noise

The novel White Noise by Don DeLillo has a great impact on the audience. The novel relates to our every day life as the average consumer in the modern world. We are all constantly surrounded my mass media and products daily, therefore we are all surrounded by consumerism. It is only a matter of time until consumerism has detrimental effects on its customers. White Noise has a negative effect on consumerism because of all the effects that White Noise says consumerism has on society. Consumerism in this novel is starting to engulf the people like Jack and his family in; the people are becoming infatuated with this new consumer culture. This consumerism is leading to a downfall within the characters. The consumerism is leading to paranoia and some horrible coping mechanisms within society.

Consumerism is leading to a mass paranoia within the society in the novel. Jack is constantly thinking about his fear of death, it is always on his mind. He constantly fears death because the media like television and radio constantly show and talk about the horrors like death. The characters in the novel even feel that when something is mentioned on television, it must be for bad news. For example, when Babette is shown on television for her posture class her family freaks out and fears that she is in danger. In the beginning on the novel the media talked about the death of schoolteachers and the media then talks about the death of the old couple that got lost in the mall. Death is always in the media and Jack can not escape it. Since he is so caught up in consumer culture with the media, then he is always surrounded with death that the media provides him and he cannot shake the fear of his eventual death. When he eventually gets exposed to Nyodene D, he has no choice but to accept the fact that he is going to die. Before the exposure he had only toyed with the fact of death, but now he knows that he will die in about 15 years because of the exposure from the airborne toxic event. He now gets more paranoid about his own death and will go to extreme measures to stop fearing death. He even shoots a poor, insane, helpless man Willie in order to get the Dylar that could possibly cure him of his fear of death (but it won’t work because it has horrible side effects and it was not tested effectively). He risks having the side effects of this experimental drug in order to get the slightest chance at having relief of having a constant fear of death.

Other characters are paranoid in different ways. Steffie shows her paranoia by constantly wearing that gas mask of hers, and by participating in the simulations. She takes these simulations seriously so that she can be prepared for the next time something like the airborne toxic event happens. She even tells her dad, “I’ll get in trouble if they see you” (205). Jack was worried that there was an actual danger and she was injured. She pushes her worried dad away so that she can put her full attention into the simulation. Wilder expresses his thoughts by constant crying and screaming. He cannot express his feelings in any other way. When Babette shows up on the television, Wilder automatically thinks that Babette was involved in some disaster because the television and media has a connotation with bad news. Wilder expresses his paranoia that Babette is in danger by crying.

Babette, like Jack, shows paranoia. She is paranoid in the same way Jack is; she constantly fears death. Babette decides to violate her moral code and sleep with Willie in order to get a special drug that is still in its testing period in order to try and suppress her fear of death. Unfortunately, it does not work and Babette gets even more paranoid and starts to have more side effects because of the drug. She is having more memory lapses and she has been seen gazing into the distance multiple times. She still fears death and now she and Jack are obsessed with Dylar. They fear death so much that they will go to the extreme to get the pills. It is a little ironic because these pills could have horrible side effects, and maybe even death since Dylar is still experimental. So Jack and Babette are willing to risk their own death if the medication could possibly get rid of their fear of death.

Each character has different coping mechanisms throughout the novel. Jack copes with his fear of death by engorging himself in his schoolwork. He even says when he is at the mall that he wishes that he had his coat and glasses because they are a way of coping with the consumerism at places like the mall. On page 82, Jack says “I only wear those on campus”. This is referring to his dark-rimmed glasses. Jack is a completely different person when he steps on the college campus. It is his escape from his real life and engorging himself in teaching Hitler studies helps him cope with his fear of death. All of the characters have different coping mechanisms, but Jack’s coping style is the one that stood out to me. Babette copes by taking the Dylar, and Steffie copes by participating in simulations, but Jack puts on a jacket and his dark-rimmed glasses and gets to be another person.